a hunter at crossroads

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a hunter at crossroads

by sebootyslay

Summary

Saved by Hannibal when he was a child, Will grew up aided by the seasoned killer raised in blood and love.

“If you are the lioness, then what am I?” Will looked over to his father. Hannibal had a knowing grin on his face.
“A hunter with a rifle, hidden in the grass, finger on the trigger and poised to shoot.”

Notes

Hey! My first Hannibal fic! This has not been beta read by anyone, so please excuse the mistakes haha

See the end of the work for more notes

Straightening up, Hannibal set to pack his things. His work here is done, and the body had been beautifully laid out in a bouquet of flowers. He hummed to himself happily. He had taken quite a lot from the man, delighted in his fit and healthy lifestyle. When he was done, Hannibal picked up his bag and walked out of the dense forest to his car. He placed his things in the trunk, shedding his plastic coat as well.

There was a small breeze, and Hannibal paused.

It smelled like blood, but it was putrid and acidic... sour, even. It didn't came from the direction of where he dumped the body, but it came from somewhere up south. Curiosity indeed killed the cat, but Hannibal is a lion at least, and he still has nine lives to spare. He stepped into his car and drove up the road, leaving his window open to let the scent waft in. It got stronger as he neared a clearing at the side of the road. It was a trailer neighbourhood, and it seemed abandoned at best. No one was in sight save for the rusty, old trailers parked haphazardly across the flat lawn. In the distance, his sharp ears caught the sounds of soft crying. Intrigued even more, Hannibal slowly parked his car near a rusty gate that leads to the yard.

As he got out, he listened again. There was certainly sounds of crying, and the bloody smell was stronger here, but there were also no other signs of life. No human, not even a peek of a squirrel or a raccoon that were native to this side of the state. Hannibal carefully pushed the rusted gate open and his shoes crunched on broken beer glasses and cigarette butts littered across the compound. His nose wrinkled in distaste, but he held himself patient as he weaved his way through broken down trailers and dirty tables and chair. The smell and crying sounds got clearer as he neared on particular trailer at a secluded corner.

Hannibal pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and layering it over the doorknob before pulling it open. Knocking would be useless, he thought as out stumbled a man wearing a plaid shirt over a grey undershirt, body stinking of death and blood and forehead shot clean in the centre. Well, Hannibal mused, smell of mystery blood is done. He sidestepped the man and entered the trailer, having to bow at the doorway. The crying is definitely from here as well, and he noticed another man slumped on a foldable dining chair, his neck brutally and crudely slashed, congealed blood pooling around him. His shirt was stained a deep red,sporting a few other slashes and stabs as well. An abandoned gun was at his feet.

Interesting, Hannibal thought.

Small sniffling were heard behind him, and he immediately turned. He saw little shoes shuffling on the floor behind the cabinet, and he cautiously neared. There, he saw a little boy, not more than the age of 6, holding his knees to his chest. He has brown curls that were matted with dirt and blood, and his cheeks were stained with dry blood as his hands. Near him Hannibal could see a bloody knife, thrown away carelessly to the side. Hannibal assessed the scene and finally understood. The boy noticed his presence and started to whimper.

"Hello there." Hannibal said gently as he got down to one knee. "Are you alright?" The boy didn't answer, but Hannibal is man with infinite patience. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The boy's eyes lifted to gaze at him, and Hannibal was stunned to see such shining, blue eyes.

"...Dead?" his voice was merely a whisper. Hannibal figured he was referring to the man slumped on the chair.

"Yes. He is very dead. In fact," Hannibal gave the scene and once over. "Dead for a couple of days." He looked down at the boy. "What's your name? You did a very good job. Messy, but good, nonetheless. "

The boy was silent for a while, assessing the situation. Hannibal almost smiled at the boy's effort to rationalize the situation in front of him.

"Will." He said finally.

"Ah, Will. Tell me Will, how long have you been here?"

"...the sky was dark three times." the boy said slowly. Hannibal nodded his head, understanding that he meant three days. The stench and the congealed blood is a testament to that.

"You have been hiding here for three days?" the boy nodded. "What about food and water, Will? Have you eaten?"

"No. Scared." Will blinked, and Hannibal could see the dark fear that clouded the shine in the boy's eyes. "What is he wakes up?"

"He won't." Hannibal held out his hand, a friendly and encouraging smile on his face. "Come with me, Will. I will keep you safe and give you food." The boy didn't move, but Hannibal knows he will. "I will make sure he won't hurt you again. No one will, and if they do, I will protect you." He said in a sure voice. The boy slowly straightened up his back. "Come, Will. You must be hungry. I have food with me, and I promise you I will take care of you."

Will was hesitant, but Hannibal knew he had the boy. Will looked long and hard at Hannibal's face, trying to read his features. He looked into Hannibal's eyes and something in him clicked. Those eyes looked familiar, and familiarity to a child means that something is safe. He slowly crawled forward and accepted Hannibal's hand.

"Good boy." Hannibal praised. He pulled Will to his embrace and lifted the boy up, for once not minding getting his suit dirty. "Let's go, shall we?"

Before he left, Hannibal took the knife with him.

The drive back to his house in Baltimore was quiet. Will slept soundly in the passenger's seat, his body so small the seat belt wasn't suitable for him. Hannibal thought that it would do, for the moment. As they reached his house and entered the garage, Hannibal switched the engine off and shook the boy's shoulders.

“Wake up, Will. We’re here.” He said. The boy sleepily blinked his eyes awake. Hannibal exited the car and walked around so he could open the passenger door. The clumsy boy had accidentally injured himself in his flurry of knife swinging days ago, and the wound had exacerbated. He would be limping for a few weeks. Hannibal opened the passenger’s seat door and clicked the seat belt off him. Will was still sleepy, and Hannibal smiled, amused at that. “Did you have a good nap?”

“Hungry.” The boy said.

“Yes, of course you would be. But I would think it would be best if we clean you up first and treat that leg before we eat.” Hannibal had laid a plastic sheet covering over his seat so that Will wouldn’t get it too dirty. His shirt and shorts were soiled and torn, shoes dirty. The man figured that it would be best to throw everything out once he had cleaned the boy.

“Okay.” Will obediently agreed.

“Come here, then.” Hannibal is not touchy with children, but for some reason, he feels the need to care for this boy. Perhaps it was because he looked so pitiful and scared, but Hannibal knew it was more than that.

Hannibal liked the child because of what he did. He liked him because he saw the gleam in his eyes, a darkness that glaze over his beautiful blue eyes so prettily that it ached his heart to see it again.

Only the matter of time, he said to himself. Besides, the boy is a killer. Where else would he go except to stay with him? Hannibal smiled at this thought. Precious boy.

He brought the boy inside, leaving the cooler with the meat at the hallway as he climbed up the stairs. He contemplated on the guest bathroom, but decided against it and entered his bedroom instead, placing the boy in the bathtub of his en-suite. He took off his dirty jacket and rolled the sleeves of his shirt.

“We are going to take a bath, and it might be painful.” He peeled the torn shirt off the boy. “If it gets too painful, you tell me, alright Will?”

“Okay.” Came the boy’s meek answer. The boy was not a talker, but he was responsive and reacted positively to Hannibal’s touch. That is a good sign. When the boy is naked, Hannibal turned the tap on so lukewarm water filled the tub. The amount of dirt and blood on Will turned the water grey immediately, so Hannibal pulled the shower head down and switched it on so a gentle spray could aid him in washing the small boy.

“I’m going to wash you now, Will.” He informed and Will nodded his head, voice still mute. He let the man wash the grime from his hair and the dried blood off his face. His small hand gripped the side of the tub as if scared to slip down and drown. When Hannibal reached his leg, the hand shot up to grip his own arm as he cringed and whined in pain.

“Hurts!” he cried, eyes prickling with tears again. Hannibal shushed him with a soothing hand through his wet curls.

“I know, darling boy. I’m sorry, but it will hurt a little bit. Please hold on for a little while.” He said, letting the boy tug on his shirt and scratch his arms as he washed his leg, all the while apologizing and hushing him. When Will was finally clean and doesn’t smell like blood and urine anymore, Hannibal turned the water off and let it drain away, grabbing a towel and wrapping the boy up in a little burrito. He lifted Will up and carried him to his bedroom.

“Cold.” The boy shivered.

“We’ll get some clothes on you.” Hannibal left the boy on the floor as he went to his closet to figure out what would fit him. At last, he settled on his red sweater and an unused boxer short to give to him. The boxers loosely fit him, and the red sweater looked comically big on the little boy, but Hannibal’s heart swelled at the sight of the boy drowning in his clothes.

“Thank you.” He said softly, voice not as gravelly as before once Hannibal gave him a bottle of water to drink on the way home. Hannibal smiled, pleased at his manners.

“You’re welcome, Will. Now stay here. We still need to treat that wound of yours.” Will sat on the floor, patiently waiting for the man to return. When he did, he was holding a small medical kit. Hannibal treated the wound fast and efficiently, wrapping the leg in bandage once he’s done.

“Hurts less.” Will commented as he wiggled his leg.

“I’m glad.” Hannibal packed the medical kit back and placed it where he got it. “Come now. I will make you a meal. You must be hungry.” Will nodded at that statement, and Hannibal gathered him in his arms before going down. Will, now a little trusting of this man, leaned his head on Hannibal’s shoulders, small fingers that peeked through the sweater gently gripping the shirt of the man holding him.

Hannibal never knew caring for children made him feel this way. Perhaps this is why people want to have children, to have someone that depended on you and look up to. His heart feels full, and the last time he felt anything like this was when Mischa was still alive.

He placed Will on the counter top, giving him sliced pieces of apple to give him something to munch on as he cooks. A simple meal, this time. Something that wouldn’t upset the boy’s stomach after starving for almost three days. When he was done, Will was still sitting still on the counter top, legs gently swinging in the air, big eyes curiously looked at the man.

“Do you like sausage, Will?”

“Yes. But Dad never lets me eat much of them.”

“Dad?” Hannibal lifted an eyebrow. “Which one was he?”

“The one in the red shirt with boxes on it.” Will said as he played with his fingers. “He says that sausages are for good boys, and he said I wasn’t.”

“Why is that, Will?” Hannibal asked as he plated the food. No need to be overly fancy. It is just for a child.

“He said I’m a bad boy because I made him poor.” Will’s voice was monotonous, as if he didn’t have any feelings at all for the man he calls his father. “I tried to be good to him. Tommy’s dad always gives him treats to share, but Dad never gave me anything.”

“I see.” Hannibal brought the plate to the dining table before returning to the boy. “Well, you’re in luck. I have sausages, and I think you’ve been a good boy enough to earn them.” Hannibal said as he picked Will up.

He didn’t miss the small stretch of a smile on the boy’s lips.

If Will was starving, he didn’t show it. The boy ate slowly, and Hannibal was impressed by his level of control and manners that a six year old boy would have never possessed. Of course, the utensils scrap against the plate, but he was child, Hannibal would’ve expected less, honestly. When Will was done eating, his plate clean of food, he leaned back on the comfortable dining chair, eyes droopy.

“Are you sleepy, Will?”

“Yes.” Will replied. “Thank you... for the meal.” He said, stopped in the middle by a yawn.

“It was my pleasure.” Hannibal is growing more fond of this polite boy. Whatever father who owned Will before must at least did something right. “Would you like to take a nap?”

“Could I?” Will rubbed a small fist against his eye.

“Of course you can. Come here.” Hannibal extended his arms, and Will felt like it was natural to lean into the touch and let the man carry him. He didn’t know who this man is, didn’t know his name or where his house is. He only knew that this man saved him, told him to not be afraid and that he will protect him, gave him a warm bath, fed him good food and let him drink plenty of water. He also like how this man always carries him around, holding him close like he cared for Will. Will likes the warmth of his body, the close touch that his father never gave him. Hannibal left Will on a sofa in his living room with a thin blanket to cover him. Will was out like a light, and Hannibal had ample time to clean up everything and even prepare and store his meat.

As he was working, he thought about the boy slumbering soundly on the sofa. It seemed like no one would miss him, he thought, the only family member of him shot dead. He still doesn’t know who the man Will killed is, but that story could be saved for another day. He could keep Will. He could turn in the right papers to the government and they would grant him care of the child.

Does he want to keep Will?

He glanced at the bloody knife he had taken along from the trailer home. It was covered in blood, but quite light and feasable for a boy like Will to wield and hold. Hannibal remembered the dark shadow that clouded the boy’s eyes, and he nodded.

He would keep Will.

"*Tėtis*!" A happy voice rang through the hallway. Hannibal, who was at his desk, smiled, amused as he waited for the thumping sound of feet to reach him. Alana in front of him, raised her eyebrows. The door of the study burst open, and they were greeted by the sight of an eight year old Will in his school uniform, holding a piece of paper. "*Tėtis*! I- oh." His eyes widened as he saw that his father had a guest with him. "I'm sorry to interrupt."

"No, it's fine, Will." Hannibal smiled. "What is it that you wanted to show me that had you running up the stairs?" he said. Alana had never seen Hannibal smile so freely before.

"I got my test results back." Will brightened up again. Hannibal gestured him to come closer, and Will politely walked towards his father. If the guest weren't here, he would have ran straight into his father's arms and climbed onto his lap.

"Oh really? How did you do?"

"Here." He showed Hannibal the piece of paper. It was simple test, really. Classifying which animals were predators, carnivores, prey, herbivores and such, but Hannibal's chest swelled in pride when he saw the red '100%' mark on top of the paper next to Will's name.

"Precious boy, you have done well." He praised and ran his hand through Will's hair. Will smiled, beaming at the attention. Hannibal could feel Alana's questioning stare, and he cleared his throat. "Will, I would like you to meet Dr. Alana Bloom. She is my colleague at work. Alana, this is my son Will." Hannibal gestured to the woman.

"Hello." Will gave her a smile and politely bowed his head.

"Hello Will." Alana gave him a smile. "Your son?" she asked Hannibal.

"Adopted." Hannibal confirmed, and Will didn't seem bothered at all by that statement. He stood still, but not rigid, next to his adopted father.

"I see. How old are you now, Will?" Alana asked.

"I'm eight now." He said. "Are you a psychiatrist like *tėtis* as well?" Alana tilted her head slightly in confusion.

"Te..tis?" her pronunciation was awkward.

"Tėtis is father in Lithuanian." Hannibal said as he stroked through Will's hair fondly. "I have been teaching him to call me that."

"So are you also a psychiatrist, Dr Bloom?" he asked, interested.

"Yes I am. And you can call me Alana, Will."

“Cool.” The boy grinned. Alana settled back in her chair, pleased by the child’s demenor. She watched as he turned back to Hannibal.

“Go change your clothes if you want to go play outside.”

“Can I bring my books out?”

“Of course. Just don’t get them dirty.”

“Thank you, *tėtis*.” Will leaned to kiss his father’s cheeks before turning to face Alana back. “It’s nice to meet you, Alana.” He said.

“And you, as well.” Alana was taken aback by the boy’s manners. He smiled at her before walking back to the door and exiting the room, closing the door gently behind him. “You never said you had a son.” She mused.

“Will came into my life more than two years ago. I refrained from mentioning him much as I wanted him to settle down comfortably in his new life.” Alana nodded her head.

“He’s a very polite boy. Much like you, to be honest.” She smiled.

“Thank you.” He returned the smile. “I take that as a compliment.”

“Where did you adopt Will?” Alana asked, interested. Hannibal’s mind reeled back to two years ago in woods of Virginia. The pungent smell of blood and soft sounds of crying.

“Wolf Trap.” He answered. “He was severely unattended for, and somehow I felt moved to take care of him. He had grown better and much healthier.”

“You didn’t seem like the fatherly type, but I’m glad you took him in. He seems happy.” Alana glanced at her wrist watch and seemed to be surprised at the time. “It’s almost three. I have an appointment with Jack at four, so I guess I have to get going.”

“Of course.” Hannibal escorted her down. From the stairs, Alana could see through the back sliding door leading to yard a small boy sitting underneath a tree with a book in his hand, an old tablecloth underneath him so that his clothes wouldn’t get dirty. The boy seemed to sense someone looking at him, and looked up. He beamed when he saw Alana and waved his hand. She waved back.

“It was nice seeing you Hannibal. Thank you for the referral.” She said with a smile.

“It is always a pleasure seeing a friend. Have a safe drive, Alana.”

“I will. Thanks Hannibal. Goodbye, and give my best to Will.” She said as she ducked into her car.

“Will do.” Hannibal watched her car reversed back into the road and drove off. He closed the door and went to the back where Will is. The boy is reading a book, his fingers trailing each of the lines so that he wouldn’t lose focus. Will is so much more advance in his reading skills, and Hannibal is proud to see him read books children wouldn’t normally read.

“Hello Will.”

“*Tėtis*.” Will stopped reading to smile up at his father. “I was getting to the last chapter.” Hannibal signalled for Will to stand up, only for him to sit down and pat his knee. Will happily sat back down, now more comfortable on his father’s lap. He leaned his head on Hannibal’s shoulders, and the man took a whiff of his sweet curls before planting a kiss there.

“Good boy. Do you want me to read to you the last chapter?”

“Please *Tėtis*.” He said, eyes drooping. The warm rays that bled through the leaves and the breeze that gently blew around him made him sleepy, and the feeling was amplified when he is in the warm embrace of his father. Hannibal, noting his sleepy son, read anyways. He cleared his throat and began reading.

“Van Baerle, led by four guards, who pushed their way through the crowd, sidled up to the black tulip, towards which his gaze was attracted...”

When Will woke up, he was still outside and still on his father’s lap. The book was placed next to them and gentle fingers were playing with his hair. He realized that he had fallen asleep amidst his father’s reading. He leaned back into the solid chest of the man and nuzzled into his neck.

“Good evening, Will.”

“Good evening, *Tėtis*.” He yawned, and quickly covered his mouth. “Sorry for falling asleep.”

“It’s alright. It was a short chapter. I could read it to you again tonight if you would like it.”

“Mhmm.” Will sighed as he closed his eyes again. “Is Alana your friend, *Tėtis*?”

“Yes, she is.”

“Does she know?”

“No, she doesn’t.” Hannibal adjusted his hand that was looped around Will’s waist. Will loved evenings like this where he and Hannibal would just spend time with each other. “Do you want her to know?”

“Hmm...” Will thought for a while.

“Tell me, what do you see in her?” Will opened his eyes and tried to remember the face of the woman. She has soft cheeks, greenish-blue eyes, brown hair that curls inwards and a pretty smile.

“She is... soft. Fragile.” Hannibal hummed at the observation. “Not weak, but maybe sometimes foolish in choices.”

“I mentored her in getting her doctorate. She does sometimes makes hasty choices, but she is not afraid to admit and amend to them.”

“Bold, yet timid.” Will’s face scrunched as his nose twitched. “But why?”

“Everybody’s scared of something, darling Will.” Hannibal said. “As am I. We are not immune to fear.”

“But why fear fear when we can control it?” Will asked. “Alana seemed like she could control her fears. Why is she still scared?”

“Tell me, my precious boy, what does she fear?” Hannibal asked, intrigued to know his son’s answer on that.

“She fears... abandonment. Deception.” Will played with his fingers. “*Tėtis*, she has the same fears that I do, but she doesn’t have trust.”

“What do you mean by trust, Will?”

“I mean,” the smart eight year old tried to put his thoughts into words. “She is on a boat, but she does not have a paddle, because she’s scared that the paddle would abandon her, so all she’s doing to move is just pushing the water with her hands.” Will frowned for a while. “That won’t get her far. I have a boat like her, but I also have a paddle who I trust to help me move my boat.”

“And who is this paddle, if I may ask?”

“Its you, *tėtis*!” Will giggled as if it were a ridiculous question. Hannibal let out a light laugh as well. It does seem like a ridiculous question.

“You trust whom you love, my darling.”

“And I love you.” Will said as he turned his head, beaming happily at his father. Hannibal’s smile softened as he cupped the boy’s round cheeks.

“And I love you as well, Will.” The boy giggled again when Hannibal kissed his forehead. “Come now. We should get inside and start preparing for dinner.”

Hannibal is forever amazed at the boy’s ability to read people. He had known Will is a pure empath on the week he had brought him home, but he never would have thought his abilities would reach to this height. Of course, he would only indulge in this skill whenever they are alone. Will sometimes cannot stop voices from ringing in his head when they go to public places, the first few weeks of school had him coming home crying to Hannibal because of the voices echoing in his head and hurting his brain. It took a few attempt from Hannibal to train Will to control his incredible skill, and soon enough the child managed to do well enough to go through school pleasantly. This is another reason why Hannibal kept Will to himself. He doesn’t want Will to be overwhelmed by the society until Hannibal thinks he is ready.

Until then, Hannibal is more than happy to keep the boy under his wing in the safety of his house, sheltered away from the prying eyes of people who might taint the shine in his precious boy’s eyes.

“*Tėtis*.” Will knocked on the door to his father’s room. A distant ‘enter’ was heard and Will pushed the door open. Inside, Hannibal was fixing cuff links onto his the cuffs of his shirt. The man looked up to the 13-year old boy.

“Yes, Will?”

“I don’t... uh.” Will sheepishly held up the tie in his hand. His collar was half up and half down, and he seemed embarrassed to lack the skill. “Help me, please?” Hannibal smiled fondly at his son.

“Come here, silly boy.” Will smiled as he entered the room, closing the door behind him. He walked to his father and handed him the deep blue silk tie. “Did you forget already?”

“Sorry *Tėtis*.” Will murmured as Hannibal lifted the other half of his collar up. “I guess I was too distracted.”

“What has gotten you so distracted, hm?” Hannibal had to kneel to get into level with the boy. Although Will is 13, he is still small in stature. Hannibal isn’t worried. The boy would eventually grow taller after his growth spurt.

“The thought of the opera.” Will said. “Franklyn.” There was a slight distaste in the way he said the name, and Hannibal chuckled.

“Why did Franklyn distract you so much?”

“He shook my hand too hard.” Will then frowned as he remembered something. “He also moved the dolls without permission, and that is rude.”

“It is.” Hannibal nodded his head.

Will, when he reach 10, had come to a fascination with hand-made plush dolls. Hannibal had bought him one out of curiosity of what he would do. He watched one night as Will dissect the doll, take out the stuffing and unraveled the stitching before redoing them and returned the doll to its original state. Soon, Hannibal bought more and each time Will demands a more specific one. One day he gave Hannibal a list of things to buy, and judging on the materials written on paper by the boy’s neat handwriting, he wanted to make a doll. The first one was not the best, but Will wasn’t a quitter. He studied more, looked up things online and the second doll came out better. He gifted Hannibal a doll of himself and a little Will on the man’s birthday last year. Hannibal had dedicated a display column for the dolls in his practice, proud of his son’s work.

Yesterday was a half day at Will’s school, so he stayed at Hannibal’s practice until his father’s appointments are all settled. Hannibal let him stay in the upstairs library loft as long as he is quiet. From there, he had a bird’s eye view of the room, and saw how Franklyn, a disastrous patient, kept on rambling on and on about *cheese*. Will could see that his father was bored, but he said nothing. When the man touched the dolls, picking the Hannibal one up and squeezing them too tight, Will closed the book he was reading a bit too loud. Hannibal glanced up, but Will darted his eyes away. His father said nothing of his actions and made Franklyn place the dolls back to where they belong.

Those dolls are not meant to be touched by anyone else than Hannibal, much less a person like Franklyn.

“Will he be there?” Will asked as his father smoothed the tie down.

“I am hoping to be wrong, but I have a strong inclination that he would be.” Will sighed. Hannibal chuckled at his son’s reaction. “Now Will, what did I taught you?”

“Never to show dislike to anyone clearly, as it is rude.” Will said, the words memorized in his head. Hannibal patted his head, mindful of the carefully styled hair.

“Good boy.” He praised.

“*Tėtis*, who will be performing tonight?”

“The main star would be Cecelia Bartolini. She is touring worldwide, and tonight the set is on Rossini’s works.” Will nodded. He wasn’t really a fan of opera like his father, his Italian somewhat still shaky, but he goes along anyways, finding joy in listening to the symphonies.

“Are you ready, Will?” Hannibal asked. Will nodded, and they both departed on Hannibal’s Bently. They didn’t interact with a lot of people as they maneuvered to their seats. Will recognized Mr and Mrs Blackwood. They greeted each other cordially, and he smiled politely when Mrs. Blackwood praised his appearance. Will sat next to an old Japanese couple on his left. They mostly remained quiet throughout the show in which Will is grateful for.

What he dreaded was the intermission. That is when everybody would have time to mingle around and talk. Will isn’t shy, he just prefers not to, often leading the conversation back to focus on his father. The voices sometimes gets in his head and it makes him get headaches, some that would even last for days.

“Would you like a drink, Will?” Hannibal asked.

“Yes please.” He watched as his father took a flute of champagne from a waiter as they made their way to the bar. Hannibal ordered him an apple cider, and Will sipped on it gratefully as a familiar but welcomed face greeted them.

“Hannibal! There you are!” the aged woman seemed happy to see them. “And you brought along William! Oh my, what a fine young lad you have turned out!”

“Ah, Mrs. Carbone, it is always a pleasure to meet you.” Hannibal smiled at her.

“Hello, Mrs. Carbone.” Will politely greeted as well.

“You don’t usually bring William around, Hannibal. I only see him during your dinner parties. What has changed?” the woman asked.

“I just wanted to expose William to the beauty of the arts. See if he likes some aspects of it. We are still exploring his interests, and I feel obliged to indulge him in any interest he does have.”

“Oh, what an attentive father you are!” Mrs. Carbone looked down at Will with a smile. “A fine choice to come to to the opera, my darling! Tonight’s performance was splendid. I am anticipating the second act. Quite a moving first act, no?”

“Will enjoys listening to the symphonies rather than the words. His Italian is still weak, and we are working on that. He does recognize the piece, and he is familiar with Rossini’s work.” Hannibal has a hand on the back of Will’s neck in a grounding gesture. Will felt grateful for the touch, as the room was starting to get loud in his head. By focusing his attention on the touch, he is able to mute other voices around him. It is a technique taught by Hannibal himself.

“Still, a young lad having such refined ears? Nothing expected less from you, Hannibal.” She laughed. Will liked Mrs. Carbone. She would often give him treats, and tonight was no other. “Here you are, darling boy! Young lads like you deserve rewards.” She handed him a small box that she retrieved from her purse. “Well, open it!” she urged excitedly. Will smiled and opened the box. Inside were two chocolate sticks, shimmered with a gold coating.

“Is this...” Will’s eyes widened.

“Mrs. Carbone.” Hannibal started, but she lifted her hand.

“No no, Hannibal. I don’t want to listen. This boy deserves a Delaffe chocolate. It is my treat!” she huffed. She then turned back to the young teen. “I hope you’d like the taste of it, young William.”

“I...thank you.” Will looked up to her to sincerely show his gratitude. He knew of Delaffee chocolates. It costs a ridiculous amount of money to buy a box of them as they are decorated with edible gold, and for her to give him this as a treat was truly something wonderful. “I don’t know how to repay you.”

“Oh hush, no repaying talk!” she was about to say something further when a figure that has been hovering for a while around them caught her eye. “Hannibal,” she said, voice somewhat amused. “I believe this man is trying to get your attention.”

Will, who finally lifted his eyes from the dazzling chocolate treat, felt his smile freeze at the sight of Franklyn. Mood dampened, he maintained his smile as he closed the small box of his expensive treat. Mrs. Carbone excused herself to find her husband, and Hannibal and Will are left to deal with Franklyn.

Hannibal could still talk civilly to the man, but Will was too annoyed to care about anything he says. His sight, however, zeroed on the strange man behind Franklyn.

“Oh, and this is my friend Tobias!” Franklyn introduced. The man had clear dark skin and wide eyes. His gaze on Hannibal made Will uncomfortable and he shifted a little bit closer to his father. Hannibal noticed and squeezed his grip on the back of Will’s neck, as if to assure him that he was alright and to calm him.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter. I have heard... great things about you.” The man spoke like a robot, and Will finds it disturbing on how his eyes lowered down to look at him. “And of you, William.”

He gaze traveled back up to Hannibal. “My name is Tobias Budge, and I run the string shop down in Baltimore.”

“Ah, the famous one next to the florist?” Tobias nodded, but Will noticed the man keep sparing glances at him even though he was speaking to Hannibal. Will felt more uncomfortable by the minute, and he reached to his side to grip Hannibal’s jacket. Hannibal noticed the subtle glances, and understood the gesture. He tried alleviating the man’s attention to himself to save his poor son. “I have heard great things about it. You don’t happen to do house visits do you? I have been thinking to replace the strings on my harpsichord, but genuine animal intestine strings are hard to find now.”

“Many have turned to... artificially made strings. They do not have the same depth as... animal strings do.” Tobias keeps odd pauses in his sentences. “Perhaps I could. Here is my card... and we can discuss this later.” He gave Hannibal his card, and the man pocketed it.

“Well, better get back to our seat. Will?” Hannibal looked down.

“Yes?”

“Come now.” He followed Hannibal’s steps as quickly as he can, feeling the intense gaze of Tobias as he walked away.

“He is looking at me.” Will whispered as they neared the entryway of the theater hall to get back to their seats.

“It’s alright, darling.” Hannibal reassured him, a hand on his back. Throughout the second act, Will cannot focus. He always felt like someone was looking at him, and he kept quiet the entire time. He wasn’t even listening to the symphonies. Hannibal noticed his son’s silence and can sense his discomfort, so as soon as the show ends, he politely declined any invitations for a chat from the socialites and quickly got into the car to drive home. Will didn’t say anything, he just followed whatever Hannibal told him to.

“What do you see, Will?” Hannibal was first to break the silence.

“Tobias? Or Franklyn?”

“Let’s start with Franklyn.” Hannibal wants to start easy. He heard Will snort.

“Easy. Desperate. Naive. Gullible.” Will stared out the window as cars flashed by. “Foolish enough to not know he is being played and fooled.”

“By whom?”

“Tobias.” Hannibal hummed at that.

“What do you think of Tobias?”

“Calculating. Smart.” Will closed his eyes, and he shuddered when the image of Tobias came to mind. “Perfectionist... Talented.” Will opened his eyes back. “He is a patient lioness in the dry Savannah, silently stalking her prey.”

“Is he a lioness, or a hyena waiting for an opportunity?” Hannibal countered back.

“Hyena seems more accurate. He wouldn’t make the first blow. He knows he’s not strong enough to overpower- No, wait. He is strong enough, but he has a strategy. He would wait for another to take the kill shot, and he leaps at the first sight of opportunity.”

“But a lioness and a hyena, surely the lioness would triumph if a fight is ever to occur.”

“Hyenas run in packs.”

“And lionesses hunt in prides.”

“Hyenas have larger packs, and they are brave to the point of stupidity, not caring if the opponent might overpower them. Once they are set on a goal, they will take action to achieve it.” Will sighed as he leaned his head back onto the leather seat. “Am I the prey in this narrative, *Tėtis*? Just lying there and wait for whoever wins so they can eat me first?”

“Will.” Hannibal reached over to place a hand on his son’s shoulder. “You are not a lying prey who is weak. I am here to protect you. Haven’t I promised you that before? A lioness protects her cub with such great intensity, even the pride leader sometimes cower under her growl.”

“If you are the lioness, then what am I?” Will looked over to his father. Hannibal had a knowing grin on his face.

“A hunter with a rifle, hidden in the grass, finger on the trigger and poised to shoot.”

“But to shoot who?”

“That is the hunter’s choice. In a larger scale, the addition of the hunter makes him the apex predator. He is the only one given a choice.”

“Do I have to make a choice, *Tėtis*?” Will asked. Hannibal could hear the weariness in his son’s voice. Tonight’s stress has taken a toll on him, and he is proud on how Will handled it.

“Everyone has to choose a path when they reach a crossroad. Some choices are clear, and some are not. When time comes, my precious boy, you will make the choice.”

“What if I choose wrong?” There was fear in his voice. Hannibal took Will’s hand and squeezed it once. This wonderful emphatic boy.

“You won’t.”

Will doesn’t understand what Hannibal meant by him being the hunter, but the conversation is long forgotten as the days pass by. Will doesn’t usually follow his father when he hunts, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t kill.

Hannibal had told him of his first kill, a man who is an acquaintance of his father. With help from Hannibal, Will has been able to recall why he killed the man. The man was a vile pig, intending to take Will away to do unsavoury things. Will's father, although not the best fathers in the history of fathers, refused to give him his son and a scuffle ensued. It ended with a bullet to his father's head. Little Will, who saw everything, cowered behind the cabinet. He saw a recently washed knife on the counter, and sneakily grabbed it, holding it close to him. The man reclined back into the foldable chair, returning to his drink. Will glanced at his father and looked into wide eyes as the body slumped heavily against the door of the trailer. He didn't know what possessed him, but Will had succumbed into a rage he had never felt before.

The next thing he realized, Hannibal was in front of him, offering him food, protection and love.

His second kill was when he was seven. Hannibal had brought down a live victim down the basement, and Will was interested to watch. It seemed that the man was stronger than Hannibal had predicted as he broke one hand free from his restraints and landed a loud punch to Hannibal's face that sent the man kneeling to the ground. Will, panicked at seeing his beloved father down and enraged by the man's action, picked up whatever's available on the table next to him and came screaming at the man, stabbing him repeatedly. He didn't realized when it was over, only to stop when gentle hands held his small, bloody ones. Hannibal had lifted him off the operation table to where he strapped the now dead and bloodied man. He turned to Will's weapon of choice, a small curved dagger, and pried it off him. Will was quiet, but he was surprised to see Hannibal looking down at him fondly.

"My sweet, darling boy. Look at your masterpiece." He cooed, and Will turned back. The man's chest was mangled with stab wounds. "Beautiful little boy." Hannibal had kissed his forehead despite the blood from the man that splattered on him. Will slowly lifted a bloody hand up and traced the bruise along Hannibal's cheek, smearing the blood there.

"Did he hurt you?" was the first question he asked.

"He did, but you hurt him back. You protected me, you sweet boy. Thank you." Will's heart swelled at the praise, and he watched as Hannibal removed the organs that are still salvageable and cut out pieces of meat from him. Hannibal had washed him down with such tenderness and care, it made Will vow to forever love this man.

Hannibal had loved him despite all he had done. In fact, the man showered him with love so intense, Will never knew love could feel like how Hannibal made him feel. The man had showered him with attention is real father never gave, fed him delicious food, got him whatever he desired, and Will finds it easier to love the man back.

His third kill was much cleaner. He was eleven, and he had taken shooting classes at Hannibal's recommendations. Will is a fast learner, and soon, he was a good shoot as well. His third kill was from their summer cabin near the lake. Will had wanted to try fishing, and Hannibal, ever the diligent father, had indulged his son in his requests. One night Will saw someone in bushes move, and the shot he took was silent as the gun was fitted with a silencer. The shadow slumped, and Hannibal woke to the sounds of glass shattering rather than the sound of gunshot. Will had shot the invader through the window, and when Hannibal went

out to check, Will had aimed right at the heart. The boy didn't mean to instantly kill the man, but he felt no remorse either. The man was a thief from what they could find on him, and Hannibal had praised him for a good and clean kill.

Will wasn't a stranger to violence. When he father returned that night, he wordlessly helped him store the meat, knowing by heart how to treat and preserve each piece.

"I am inviting Tobias Budge tomorrow for dinner." Hannibal said.

"Here?" Will asked as he vacuumed packed a kidney.

"I did want him to look at the harpsichord strings." Hannibal watched as his son stored the last of the meat into their freezer.

"Is that when I would reach my crossroad, t*ėtis*?"

"It is." Hannibal confirmed. He saw Will lifting his head and locking gazes with him. He had always adored the blues of his eyes, and the colour seemed to be amplified whenever the the shadow or darkness clouded Will's eyes. He waited for Will's answer.

"Only a fool would throw away a paddle, and I am no fool, *tėtis*." Will said softly, and Hannibal smiled, proud.

Tobias Budge came right on time, and he was suitably dressed for the dinner occasion. Will had welcomed him in, his heart now calm now that he has made his choice. Will had offered him a drink and led him to the dining room.

"*Tėtis* is preparing the food in the kitchen. It would be ready soon." The young teen politely said. Tobias raised an eyebrow.

"Tetis?"

"It means father, in Lithuanian."

"I didn't know you spoke more than one language."

"William speaks four now," Hannibal answered as he emerged from the kitchen to the entryway of the dining room. "Five, if you count his horrible Italian."

"*Tėtis*." Will groaned.

"Please show our guest his seat, Will." Hannibal said with a smile. "The food will be out soon. Please, Tobias, have a seat."

"Of course." Tobias followed Will as the young teen led him to a chair near the head of the table. "Thank you, William."

“You’re welcome, Mr. Budge.” He replied, equally polite. Will took a seat left opposite of him, and at that moment, Hannibal entered with the food. It was extravagant, as all things Hannibal did were. After setting all the food down on the table, Hannibal took a seat next to Will, right in front of Tobias, and began eating. Will had refilled Tobias’ wine glass and poured his father a glass. For him, he was content with just drinking sparkling grape juice.

Hannibal controlled the conversation, and it mainly focused on stringed musical instruments. Will half listened, he was enjoying the food more than hearing the conversation. However, it took a sharp turn to the left when Tobias said something completely out of topic.

“You are a very dangerous man, Dr. Lecter.” Hannibal calmly sipped on his wine as Will started paying attention again.

“Whatever do you mean by that?” Hannibal asked. Will saw that his glass was empty and stood up.

“I’m going to take refills.” He said in masked nervousness. That seemed to fool Tobias as he leaned back on his chair, letting Will disappear back into the kitchen without stopping him.

“I followed you one day.”

“You live a very dangerous life, Tobias.” Hannibal replied. He had put down his fork and knife to fully focus on the man in front of him.

“A friend is nice, in situations like this.” Tobias said with a slight smile. “Your boy William seems to know, but he doesn’t look like he participates.”

“I try to keep William away. He sleeps better at night that way.” Hannibal said as he sipped his wine.

“He has a tremendous gift.” Hannibal waited for him to continue. “He can read people. That would be a very useful skill for you, won’t it Dr. Lecter?”

“I do not use or benefit from Will’s gifts in any way. If he decides to grace me with them, then I am among the privileged. If he doesn’t, then that is his choice.” Hannibal stated. “A companion, you say?”

“Yes. Someone who understands.” Tobias said with a sly smile. “Not many live the way we do, Dr. Lecter. A companion would be wonderful.”

“I’m afraid that you are different that us, Tobias, as you do not live like us. I have no intention into being your friend.” Hannibal’s lips lifted in that of a smile, but not quite reaching it yet. “Nor do I intend your departure from this place.” Tobias looked down at the food then back up at Hannibal.

“What have you-”

“Oh don’t worry. I didn’t place poison there, I would never do that to the food.” Hannibal’s smile had escalated to that of cat watching her prey struggle to break free of their inevitable fate.

“What do you mean then, doctor?”

“I mean that,” Hannibal lifted his wine glass as he saw Will approaching them. “Will does not participate in hunts, but that does not mean he never killed.” Before Tobias could react, Will had come from behind and with a clean flick of his wrist and the small curved dagger he used for his second kill, Tobias slumped in his seat, dead, as warm blood bubbled over his gaping wound on his throat.

“And the hunter has pulled the trigger.” Will said softly. Hannibal lifted his hand, a motion to beckon Will to come to him. Will did, and he was rewarded with kiss on his forehead and a hand running through his curls soothingly.

“My precious boy.” Hannibal cooed. “A darling hunter he is, and he had made his choice.” Will turned to look at the dead Tobias and slowly a smile stretched from his lips. Hannibal watched as the shadow darkened the colour of his darling’s eyes. “Beautiful little boy.” He whispered.

Indeed, Will is.

End Notes

Kudos and comments keeps my being alive and functioning. Also, I live for little Will being cared for by adult Hannibal.

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